

# ***Teaching Literacy in Tennessee***

## **Professional Learning Package:**

### **Participant Learning Guide**

#### *Learning Session #1*

### **Session Summary**

This first learning session explores key ideas about *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee*. It is designed to build teachers' understanding of what effective literacy teaching looks like at a high level. It introduces educators to the research base, theory of action, and key terms of *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee*.

### **Objectives**

- Read and discuss key excerpts from *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee*
- Define “skills-based competencies” and “knowledge-based competencies” and understand how they work together
- Review the theory of action and apply it to a classroom context

## Teaching Literacy in Tennessee

In the May of 2017, the Tennessee Department of Education published a document called *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee*. This guide was designed to support educators in improving literacy instruction by providing concrete information, examples, and recommendations. *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee* is grounded in a set of research takeaways, which are found on **page 7**. Read the research takeaways and discuss the following question:

- ***Imagine a teacher who has read this research and applied it to their classroom. What would their literacy instruction look like? Use the space below to draw or write a description.***

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### RESEARCH TAKEAWAYS

There is a significant amount of research regarding early grades reading. This document and the framework for teaching literacy are grounded in the following five research takeaways:

- 1** **Students need the opportunity to engage with a large amount of texts.** Students should spend a substantial portion of their day engaged in listening to, reading, thinking, talking, and writing about texts. The amount of time students spend reading and listening to text is a major contributor to improvement in students' vocabulary and **comprehension**. Additionally, regular practice reading is essential to develop students' **fluency** and word recognition.<sup>2, 8, 9, 18, 24</sup>
- 2** **Students need the opportunity to read complex texts.** Complex texts are texts that provide an appropriate level of **rigor** aligned with grade level expectations. The complex texts selected should represent a range of narrative and informational genres to support students' development of knowledge and vocabulary. Providing students with access to complex texts generates opportunities to stretch students' literacy **skills** while simultaneously building their world knowledge and vocabulary. Research also recommends utilizing complex texts that integrate other disciplines in order to support the balance of both skills-based and knowledge-based competencies in early literacy instruction.<sup>1, 6, 10, 14, 19</sup>
- 3** **Students need to think deeply about and respond to text through speaking and writing.** Research tells us that teachers should give students ample opportunities to read, reread, respond to questions that require them to go back into the text and engage in discussions with peers. In fact, there is a growing body of study to support teachers taking the role of facilitator of knowledge by guiding students through text-based discussions. Authentic classroom discussion allows students to share and expand their thinking and use language in new ways. Specifically, discussions about texts provide opportunities for students to collaboratively build knowledge that in turn supports and strengthens their writing. Students' overall reading development is supported when they have opportunities to respond to text verbally and then in writing.<sup>12, 13, 15, 21, 22, 32</sup>
- 4** **Students need to develop writing skills in connection to what they are reading.** Just as the volume of reading is essential to developing proficiency as a reader, time spent writing is essential to developing proficiency as a reader, writer, and thinker. These skills should be taught through mini-lessons in connection to text—rather than in isolation. Authentic opportunities to write in response to text provides a vehicle through which teachers can support students in developing writing skills. Reading and listening to texts assists students in thinking like writers, while intentional and direct instruction assists students in developing the skills of writers. Opportunities for authentic writing also support students' understanding of sentence composition, which in turn supports their reading proficiency.<sup>7, 9, 13, 16, 17, 26</sup>
- 5** **Students need practice with foundational literacy skills that have been explicitly taught and systematically applied through reading and writing.** Every reading and writing experience should provide students with an opportunity to develop multiple skills-based competencies. Teachers should provide explicit and **systematic** instruction on foundational skills, such as: print concepts, **phonological awareness**, **phonics** and word recognition, word composition, and fluency. Once students receive instruction in particular skills based on a carefully planned sequence, they will progress more quickly when provided with opportunities to apply those skills in the context of authentic reading and writing as opposed to isolated skill and drill work.<sup>3, 5</sup>

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INTRODUCTION

## Skills-based and Knowledge-based Competencies

*Teaching Literacy in Tennessee* recognizes that students must develop both knowledge and skills to become strong readers. Review the information on skills-based and knowledge-based competencies found on **page 8**. After reading, complete the following activity with a partner:

- ***How would you define skills-based and knowledge-based competencies? Using the space below, write a summary, or draw a picture that explains the meaning of these terms.***

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### SKILLS-BASED AND KNOWLEDGE-BASED COMPETENCIES

Proficient readers use both skills-based and knowledge-based competencies to make meaning from text. Each one is vitally important, and neither serves as the foundation for the other; rather, **students must develop skills-based and knowledge-based competencies at the same time.**<sup>10</sup>

SKILLS-BASED COMPETENCIES

These competencies are **constrained skills**, meaning that they are learned completely and are universally needed to read and write. Skills-based competencies support students in foundationally understanding how letters, sounds, and words work in print.

Print Concepts

Fluency

Phonological Awareness

Phonics and Word Recognition

Word Composition (spelling)

*Shawn was highly skilled at deciphering the words on a page. Tests of his ability to blend letter sounds into words and recognize complex spelling patterns placed him on par with fourth grade students. Yet Shawn struggled with comprehension. He routinely failed to derive meaning from the sentences he decoded, and his ability to fly through reading material rarely translated into broader or deeper learning. As the year continued, Shawn's weak comprehension base left him struggling with any task that required more than word recognition.\**

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INTRODUCTION

KNOWLEDGE-BASED COMPETENCIES

These competencies are **unconstrained skills**, meaning that they develop across a lifetime and are not identical for all readers. Knowledge-based competencies support students in creating meaning from text.

The Ability to Understand and Express Complex Ideas

Vocabulary

Oral Language Skills

Concepts about the World

*Gerald lacked basic reading fluency, with reading screeners placing his abilities at an early first-grade level. Yet when he had help decoding letters on the page, Gerald brought a deep engagement with the text's meaning and a wide range of comprehension strategies, such as the ability to compare multiple versions of a story. This allowed him to draw useful information from the text. These abilities created a very different arc of progress throughout the year. As targeted interventions addressed Gerald's skill deficits, he was able to excel across subject areas.\**

\*From Setting the Foundation

Share your summaries and drawings. Then, work together as a group to create one common summary or picture that incorporates your different understandings. Close this section by discussing the following question:

- ***How do skills-based and knowledge-based competencies work together in literacy development? Think about Shawn and Gerald (the two students described on page 8) and any students you have worked with whose stories illustrate the importance of both knowledge and skills.***

## Tennessee's Theory of Action

Tennessee has set an ambitious goal of having at least 75 percent of third graders reading on grade level by 2025. To achieve this goal, we have anchored our work in a strong theory of action. Our theory of action, shown on **page 10** and copied below, outlines an instructional approach that reflects the five research takeaways and the connection between skills- and knowledge-based competencies. Read the theory of action. As you read, underline key words or phrases that stand out to you.

**The framework for *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee* is predicated on a theory of action that is grounded in research:**

If we provide daily opportunities for all students to build skills-based and knowledge-based competencies by...

- engaging in a high volume of reading;
- reading and listening to complex texts that are on or beyond grade level;
- thinking deeply about and responding to text through speaking and writing;
- developing the skill and craft of a writer; and
- practicing foundational skills that have been taught explicitly and systematically and applied through reading and writing;

**then, we will meet or exceed our goal of having 75 percent of third graders reading on grade level by 2025.**

## Tennessee's Theory of Action in Practice: Mr. Hermann's Classroom

*Teaching Literacy in Tennessee* provides a rich narrative example of what our theory of action looks like in practice. Reread the story of Mr. Hermann's first grade class (**pages 14-34**), and complete the following graphic organizer. Look for specific pieces of evidence from Mr. Hermann's class that show how he is applying the theory of action to his classroom.

Theory of Action	Evidence of Application in Mr. Hermann's Class
Students engage in a high volume of reading	
Students read and listen to complex texts that are on or beyond grade level	
Students think deeply about and respond to text through speaking and writing	
Students develop the skill and craft of a writer	
Students practice foundational skills that have been taught explicitly and systematically and applied through reading and writing	

## Mr. Hermann's Classroom: Discussion

After reading and reflecting on Mr. Hermann's classroom, discuss the questions below.

- *How does Mr. Hermann integrate the theory of action throughout his instruction?*
- *How does Mr. Hermann develop students' skills-based and knowledge-based competencies?*
- *What else stood out to you as you read about Mr. Hermann's classroom?*

## Tennessee's Theory of Action: Reflect

Think about your own instruction and the extent to which the theory of action lives in your classroom. Where do you see the theory of action reflected in your current approach to literacy instruction? Are there parts of the theory of action that you'd like to think more about and apply more deeply to your classroom? Use the following graphic organizer to guide your reflection. Then, discuss your thoughts with a partner or small group.

<b>Theory of Action</b>	<b>Evidence of Application from My Own Classroom OR Ideas for How I Can Grow in this Area</b>
Students engage in a high volume of reading	
Students read and listen to complex texts that are on or beyond grade level	
Students think deeply about and respond to text through speaking and writing	
Students develop the skill and craft of a writer	
Students practice foundational skills that have been taught explicitly and systematically and applied through reading and writing	

## Preparing for the Next Learning Session

*Teaching Literacy in Tennessee* provides a companion document with additional information for supporting English learners. The differentiation strategies shared in this companion document are a helpful resource for all teachers of diverse learners, not just those who teach English learners.

Before the next learning session, read the narrative vignette in the companion document (pages 22-30), which illustrates another instructional sequence from Mr. Hermann's classroom. As you read, consider the following questions:

- How does Mr. Hermann support students in developing both skills-based and knowledge-based competencies?
- How do we see Mr. Hermann apply the theory of action in his classroom?
  - Students engage in a high volume of reading
  - Students read and listen to complex texts that are on or beyond grade level
  - Students think deeply about and respond to text through speaking and writing
  - Students develop the skill and craft of a writer
  - Students practice foundational skills that have been taught explicitly and systematically and applied through reading and writing
- How does Mr. Hermann differentiate his instruction so it meets the needs of the diverse learners in his classroom?

The *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee English Learner Companion* is hyperlinked [here](#), and can also be found at this URL:

[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/readready/documents/teaching\\_literacy\\_tennessee\\_english\\_learner\\_companion.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/readready/documents/teaching_literacy_tennessee_english_learner_companion.pdf)

The description of Mr. Hermann's classroom begins on page 22.

We will discuss Mr. Hermann's classroom further in Learning Session #2.